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ABSTRACT

The question of whether the public kindergarten neighborhood can effectively assume a meaningful role in the development of children's racial attitudes is investigated in this study. Focus centers on the public kindergarten since, in the absence of racially mixed neighborhoods, it constitutes the first formal interracial experience for most children. Two hundred and forty six-year-old children were divided into eight groups on the basis of race, sex, and public kindergarten experience. Subjects individually participated in a two-part selection procedure designed to investigate racial preferences. Children consistently registered strongest preference for same race individuals and totally same race classroom settings. The study suggests that the racially mixed kindergarten neighborhood seems to be unable to perform effectively the social interaction and attitude development functions one would associate with the racially integrated residence neighborhood. Until the latter becomes social reality, the most concerted efforts in racial mixing may have primarily cosmetic rather than depth effects on children's attitudes. (Author/AM)

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THE PUBLIC KINDERGARTEN CONCEPT AS A FACTOR IN RACIAL ATTITUDES

This study investigated the question of whether the public "kindergarten neighborhood" can effectively assume a meaningful role in the development of children's racial attitudes. Focus centers upon the public kindergarten because — in the absence of racially mixed neighborhoods — it constitutes the first formal interracial experience for most children. Two hundred forty 6-year-old children were divided into eight groups on the basis of race (black/white), sex, and public kindergarten experience. Subjects individually participated in a two-part selection procedure designed to investigate racial preferences. Children consistently registered strongest preference for same-race individuals and totally same-race classroom settings. The study suggests that the racially mixed "kindergarten neighborhood" seems unable to perform effectively the social interaction and attitude development functions one would associate with the racially integrated residence neighborhood. Implications are discussed.

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The Public Kindergarten Concept as a Factor in Racial Attitudes

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Several threads in racial attitude research have developed into a fabric which carries surprisingly interwoven implications for children -- especially surprising when one considers the diverse research avenues from which these threads have come. Historically, Deutsch and Collins (1951) brought a racial attitude dimension to the proximity factor in social attraction, demonstrating the prominent extent to which residing nextdoor to one another can promote social attraction and the development of positive racial attitudes. Several researchers (Koch, 1946; Springer, 1950; Goodman, 1964; Renninger & Williams, 1966; et al.) have given strong suggestion that children's racial attitudes have been formed by late preschool age. Because racially-integrated neighborhoods have not been a prominent social reality, it has not been possible to further examine a Deutsch & Collins-type finding from the child attitude formation perspective. Within a longitudinal study of the relationship between residence neighborhoods and children's racial attitudes, this investigator had an earlier, brief research glimpse of the potential importance of residence neighborhood as a contributor to racial attitude formation among preschool children (Palmer, 1975). But such research glimpses have been fleeting and impossible to study long-range -- given the infrequency of racially-integrated neighborhoods and the frequency of mobility and transition within those which exist. In perspective, the historical research fabric contains prominent threads of implication that children's racial attitudes have been formed by school age and that an early experience of racially-integrated neighborhood residence could substantially promote the development of positive racial attitudes. Conversely, there is implication

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that the early experience of racially-segregated neighborhood residence can have a significant effect upon the development of negative racial attitudes. Because the latter experience is the most prevalent social reality for young children today, the public schools have become the setting in which most children first experience racial integration -- or perhaps more appropriately, racial mixing. Children at one and the same time have their segregated residential neighborhood alongside their racially-mixed educational neighborhood. With public kindergarten introducing the latter "neighborhood" one year earlier in a child's development, the question becomes one of whether this earlier introduction can carry within it the potential to change or modify racial attitudes developed in the same-race settings of family and residence. Until integrated residence neighborhoods become a social reality, can the "kindergarten neighborhood" perform a surrogate-type function with any degree of effectiveness?

Because North Carolina gradually introduced public kindergarten to the educational system, the setting provided unique opportunity to investigate aspects of this racial attitude question. Midway in the state's kindergarten program, approximately 50% of children entering first grade were kindergarten "graduates" while the remaining 50% had not received public kindergarten experience. The setting was tailor-made for a comparative examination of racial attitudes to determine whether any systematic differences were evident as a function of public kindergarten experience.

Method

To investigate the question, 240 six-year-old children were divided into eight groups on the basis of race (black/white), sex, and public kindergarten experience. Subjects individually participated in a selection

procedure designed to detect racial attitudes. In the Part 1 adaptation of a Clark-type (1939) procedure, each subject was shown two drawings of a child -- same sex as subject, both drawings having identical features with the exception of skin color. Following the established format, the child was asked to hand the experimenter the picture of the boy/girl the child wanted to play with. Subsequent choice requests were designed to gain information relating to racial evaluation, racial awareness, and racial self-identification. Presentations were position randomized.

The Part 2 adaptation of a Cardwell-type (1969) procedure involved presentation of school classroom drawings in four possible combinations: all black class, racially balanced class with black teacher, racially balanced class with white teacher, all white class. With the exception of the racially balanced class drawings, the teachers presented in drawings were racially matched to the subjects. This procedure investigated children's attitudes regarding preferred racial composition within a classroom and preferred race of teacher.

Throughout all experimental procedures, experimenter was matched to subject on the basis of race and sex. In combination, the format permitted a multi-facet examination of the public kindergarten experience as a potential element in the development of children's racial attitudes, and children had opportunity to express these attitudes in both individual and group preference settings.

Results

In Part 1, the data from three paired-comparisons were used to detect children who lacked either racial awareness or racial self-identification and to eliminate their data from the results. Part 1 data then were analyzed using a 2 x 2 x 2 (race, sex, kindergarten) factorial design. The race variable attained significance ($F=33.5$, $df=1/232$, $p<.001$), and a Duncan's

Multiple Range Test of this effect indicated that children were registering same-race preference -- that in this paired-comparisons format, children were making positive evaluation preferences for the child of their own race. Absence of a significant race x sex x kindergarten interaction provided indication that participation in public kindergarten had no significant effect upon expression of racial preference for individual children.

Instituting the same racial awareness and racial self-identification criteria used in Part 1, the Part 2 data were analyzed within a 2 x 2 x 2 x 3 (race, sex, kindergarten, trials) factorial design. The trials factor represented the three classroom choice possibilities -- all black, all white, racially balanced. Duncan's Multiple Range Test of significant effects revealed the following:

Trials ($F=44.4$, $df=2/464$, $p<.0$[illegible])

Preference pattern was consistently the following -- same race classroom, racially balanced classroom, other race classroom. All children were choosing same race classroom significantly more frequently than either the racially balanced or the other race classroom; and all children were choosing the racially balanced classroom significantly more frequently than the other race classroom.

Trials x Race ($F=12.3$, $df=2/464$, $p<.005$)

Black children made significantly more other race classroom choices than did white children. Correspondingly, white children were making significantly more same race classroom choices than black children.

Trials x Kindergarten ($F=5.0$, $df=2/464$, $p<.05$)

Children with public kindergarten experience demonstrated significantly greater incidence of other race classroom choice than did children without preschool experience.

Trials x Sex x Kindergarten ($F=3.9$, $df=2/464$, $p<.05$) Revealed that the predominant trials x kindergarten effect had been among girls. The girls with kindergarten experience demonstrated significantly greater incidence of other race classroom choice than did girls without preschool experience.

Within the Part 2 procedures, each subject had received two paired comparisons in which the preference possibilities were between two racially balanced classroom drawings. Because race of teacher was the only factor differentiating these drawings, choice patterns afforded an opportunity to examine teacher-race preferences among these children. Response data were analyzed using a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design (race, sex, kindergarten). Duncan's Multiple Range Test of a significant race x sex x kindergarten interaction ($F=4.97$, $df=1/232$, $p<.05$) revealed that black girls with kindergarten experience expressed significantly stronger same-race teacher preference than did their male counterparts. In fact, male blacks with kindergarten experience expressed preference for white teachers. A parallel to this preference pattern was not found among male whites with kindergarten experience. The latter group registered prominent same-race teacher preference. Rank ordering the strength of same-race teacher preference, group responses placed them in the following order: WFNK, WMK, BFK, WMNK, BFNK, BMNK, WFK, BMK (the latter group expressing, in effect, other-race teacher preference).*

Discussion

The general picture within these findings is that of children according first preference to their own race in both individual and group

* The convenience code represented within these letters is: B - Black, W - White, F - Female, M - Male, K - Public kindergarten experience, NK - No previous kindergarten experience (either public or private). Outcome within the BMK group was totally unexpected, and the author has no viable explanation at this time.

choice settings. Within the framework of this basic preference pattern, black children and children with public kindergarten experience have demonstrated the most prominent readiness to choose participation in other-race classroom settings. While these same-race-preference results would seem to support earlier research suggestions of personal and racial pride (Hraba & Grant, 1970), the fact that same-race-preference is significantly stronger than a preference for the racially balanced classroom indicates that genuine racial integration has not yet been achieved within the elementary school setting. At this point the racially mixed "kindergarten neighborhood" seems unable to perform effectively the social interaction and attitude development functions which rightfully would be the province of the racially integrated residence neighborhood. Until the latter becomes social reality, our most concerted efforts in racial mixing may have primarily cosmetic rather than depth effect upon children's attitudes. To some extent the situation parallels that of two self-contained ships traveling alongside each other on the same river. Though together in one sense, the passengers remain separate in still another. To travel alongside holds far more promise and hope than would traveling in different rivers, but until the ships can freely exchange passengers, the journey will not be completed. It would appear that the "kindergarten neighborhood" resembles the two ships coming closer together, and the results suggest that the former shares the basic limitations of the latter.

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